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Mayor

Public Health Committee

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Testimony

Senator Abrams, Representative Steinberg, Senator Hwang, Senator Somers, Representative Petit, and honorable members of the Public Health Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on:

HB 5397 - An Act Declaring Gun Violence a Public Health Crisis and Establishing the Office of Gun Violence Prevention and Advisory Council on Gun Violence Prevention and Intervention

SB 477 - An Act Concerning the Public Health of Residents of the State

Like many communities around the country, Hartford has seen a painful spike in gun violence since the outbreak of the pandemic. Despite the number of overall shootings so far this year being lower than it's been in recent years, the number of fatal shootings is up.

HB 5397 would declare that gun violence constitutes a public health crisis. It also establishes an Office of Gun Violence Prevention within the Department of Public Health, with the goal of substantially decreasing the level of gun violence in the state, and creates an advisory council on Gun Violence Prevention and Intervention.

Also included in HB 5397 is the establishment of a new grant program to provide funding for gun violence prevention and intervention initiatives to be administered by the Office of Gun Violence Prevention. Organizations must demonstrate an ability to conduct initiatives in an effective manner and conduct regular evaluations of such initiatives. Furthermore, the Office of Gun Violence Prevention must consult with the Advisory Council on Gun Violence Prevention and Intervention to develop grant priorities, select grant award recipients, and determine reporting requirements for grant recipients. Grant funding is vital to the City's ability to expand and support efforts to address community gun violence.

In Hartford, we are making significant investments in community safety through our community partners. For example, we have allocated some of our American Rescue Plan resources to expand the COMPASS Youth Collaborative's Peacebuilders program to increase the number of violence interrupters in Hartford and make sure that they get training and the compensation they deserve. Additionally, we are getting ready to launch a Hospital-based Violence Intervention Program in partnership with Hartford Communities that Care, Mothers United Against Violence, and our hospital systems with the leadership of Connecticut Children's. This partnership will enable us to provide sustained case-management support to victims of gun violence.

Most recently, the city of Hartford was awarded a federal grant of \$500,000 from the U.S. Department of Justice's Office of Justice Programs for the Hartford Police Department's Smart Policing Initiative; "*Prioritizing Investigatory Responses to Gun Violence: Improving Case Clearance for Nonfatal Injury Shootings*," which focuses on response to non-fatal shootings. The grant funds will enable our Police Department's shooting response team to quickly respond to non-fatal shooting incidents with the same level of resources and intensity that is normally afforded only to homicide investigations.

Senate Bill 477 would establish a Commission on Gun Violence Intervention and Prevention to coordinate the funding and implementation of evidence-based, evidence-informed, community-centric gun programs and strategies to reduce community gun violence in the state. While I appreciate the intent of SB 477, I believe HB 5397 provides a more robust and permanent framework for the establishment and implementation of a grant program. The Commission in SB 477 would hire an executive director, who would serve at the pleasure of the commission, whereas HB 5397 would establish an Office within the Department of Public Health (DPH). This office at DPH would have a director and designated staff to carry out the responsibilities of the office, including the grant award program. I believe the latter, more permanent, structure would better ensure the success and longevity of this important work.

Thank you for your consideration of these important matters. I would be pleased to answer any questions you may have.